

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 004336

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TAGS: PREL KPAL ASEC IS EG LTG

SUBJECT: GENERAL WARD'S DISCUSSION WITH OMAR SOLIMAN IN CAIRO

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) LTG Ward and Omar Soliman, meeting in Cairo June 6, shared views on the need for a clear chain of authority in the revamped security services of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Soliman said Israel's total disengagement from Gaza would enhance trust between Israeli and Palestinian security services, as would more frequent dialogue. He hoped the USG would facilitate such a dialogue and temper over-ambitious expectations of Palestinian security capabilities. Soliman also called on all donor nations to contribute, not simply pledge support, to the PA's practical requirements for uniforms, vehicles, and equipment. He hoped Israel would permit donations to reach the Palestinians, although he cited cases to the contrary. The PA security services needed 5,000 troops to field 10 battalions in Gaza by July, asserted Soliman, adding that the forces needed equipment to be effective. LTG Ward noted that the Palestinians do not have the ability to fund these numbers; Soliman replied that they can be taken from existing forces.

¶2. (C) Soliman lamented that Israel had not clarified its intent with regards to "the nature of disengagement" and whether its withdrawal from Gaza would be total. Planning on the part of the PA and international coordinators was impossible without a clearer vision of Israel's intent. Soliman also said the GOI had not approved the deployment of Egyptian border guards to help secure the Gaza-Egypt border. The absence of Egyptian troops might give the IDF an excuse to remain in the Philadelphia strip, he said, likely contributing to a continued "cycle of violence." Partial withdrawal could be worse than no withdrawal at all, said Soliman, calling for a total and coordinated Israeli pullout. Partial disengagement would "not encourage the Palestinians to be quiet."

¶3. (C) Citing the three Palestinian priorities of rebuilding security services, improving the economy, and smooth disengagement, Soliman stressed the need for the Palestinian people to have hope in their future. Jobs and expectations of an independent state were critical elements of that hope. He said Hamas would garner 70 percent of the seats in the Palestinian legislature if elections were held too soon; Soliman preferred a delay in elections and called for the strengthening of Fatah. He said he might host another round of dialogue among Palestinian factions and said he planned to travel to Israel in mid-June. End summary.

¶4. (C) U.S. Security Coordinator LTG William Ward met in Cairo June 6 with Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) Chief Omar Soliman. LTG Ward was joined by the Charge, ORA Chief, Lead Ops Planner COL Buckley, Civil Affairs Planner LTC Cotton, and Poloff (notetaker).

Sunni Participation in Iraqi Politics

¶5. (C) Soliman began by expressing concern about weak Sunni participation in the new Iraqi government and the need to prevent excessive Iranian influence in Iraq. He wanted the U.S. "to find a way to bring back the Sunni" to participate in the political process and in drafting the new constitution. A larger Sunni role would "bring back stability," he argued, and limit Tehran's influence. Soliman said the Sunni desired to "take part not as a minority, but as partners" in governance. Soliman acknowledged efforts being made towards greater Sunni participation, yet seemed to appeal for increased mediation to facilitate it.

Building Effective Palestinian Security Forces

¶6. (C) Shifting to LTG Ward's security mission, Soliman said we needed to "secure disengagement" to restore trust and return a "good mood" to Palestinian relations with Israel. He endorsed LTG Ward's call for increased dialogue between the parties, adding his view that the U.S. had the most influence in pressing for such a dialogue. "They listen to me 50 percent, to Jordan maybe 30 percent, and to the U.S.

100 percent," he suggested. Although "they may implement zero," at least, he said, the parties gave consideration to U.S. desires. He called for a strong effort to build trust through a regime of regular meetings between Israeli and Palestinian security services, in which meetings the needs of both sides could be raised frankly and at all levels -- between ministers and heads of security services but also "in the field." Soliman said Israel might accept a more robust exchange with Palestinian security services if the U.S. suggested it and offered to attend. LTG Ward noted that exchanges "at echelon" were vital to maintain good coordination. Nasser Yusif's desire for "full control" was a limiting factor, admitted Soliman.

17. (C) Soliman said we cannot expect Palestinian security services to "be heroes" overnight, but must be practical in building on their modest capabilities. He cited Egypt's support for reform of the Palestinian security services, including a willingness to help equip them if other donors did not come forward. Equipping the security services was difficult when donors did not follow through on their pledges, and when Israel did not permit donations to reach the Palestinians, he lamented. Soliman said a more trusting relationship between Israeli and Palestinian authorities (bolstered through frequent dialogue) might lead to a situation in which Israel felt it could release more equipment to the PA, rather than deny the PA the materiel it needed to perform its security duties. Soliman lamented that Israel had even refused delivery of fire trucks to the PA. He also called for donors to make concrete contributions -- with precise timetables -- rather than simply making pledges; he pointed to multiple offers of uniforms, for example, but none delivered. "Be tough with the donor community," he said, or "we will wait a long time and they will do nothing."

18. (C) The PA security services needed to recruit enough personnel to field 10 battalions (a total of 5,000 troops) in Gaza by July, said Soliman, but even a force of that size could not offer security without rifles, ammunition, and equipment. They cannot face Hamas "with a stick" and have any impact, he emphasized. Responding to LTG Ward's caution that internal disputes and even violence between rival services dampened donor interest in supplying the PA security apparatus, Soliman said the culprit was often Hamas. LTG Ward noted efforts to coordinate donor assistance, yet warned against using the lack of equipment as an excuse to do nothing. "The clock is ticking" and the PA needs to begin with what it has, he argued, factoring in new resources as they become available.

19. (C) Returning frequently during the conversation to the need for a clear chain of command in the PA security services, LTG Ward and Soliman heartily agreed that more effective authority structures were a must. Soliman said Palestinian officers operated more as militias than as a disciplined military and some compromise would be required (and it would take many years) to fashion them into effective security forces. Nasser Yusif is "imagining things" if he thinks he can control them all, said Soliman. He said the goal of whittling Palestinian security organs from 11 to three was over-ambitious; "on the ground there are still 10," and six might be a fair compromise, he suggested. It was imperative to Soliman that the services have a clear leader, effective chain of command, and clarity of mission.

Need Coordinated Gaza Disengagement

110. (C) The EGIS Chief lamented the lack of information from Israel regarding "the nature of disengagement." He cited uncertainties about the extent of withdrawal from Rafah and the Philadelphi strip, for example, whether links to the West Bank would be established, and how "total" the withdrawal from Gaza would be. Israeli approval for Egypt to deploy border guards in the Rafah area, which Soliman argued was vital for border security, was also uncertain. Soliman said planning on the part of the PA and international coordinators was impossible without a clearer vision of Israel's intent. He worried that GOI hesitation to approve the Egyptian border guard deployment would lead to the Israeli security services arguing (successfully) in favor of keeping the IDF in the Philadelphi corridor -- and ensuring a continued "cycle of violence" by giving the Palestinians a "target" and inviting IDF retaliation. "We have accepted their conditions" for the deployment, he stated, but "have received no reply." Soliman said he had been told that Israeli Prime Minister Sharon was unable to get the approval of his government to finalize the Egyptian border guard deployment. Partial withdrawal could be worse than no withdrawal at all, said Soliman, calling for a total and coordinated Israeli pullout. Partial disengagement would "not encourage the Palestinians to be quiet."

Building Hope, Limiting Hamas, and Continuing Engagement

111. (C) Summing up priorities as coordinating disengagement, security sector reform, and building trust between the PA and GOI, Soliman stressed that we need to give the Palestinian people hope in their future. He called on the U.S. to "keep insisting on a state for the Palestinians." He also stressed the need for improving the Palestinian economy and said his advice to economic coordinator Wolfensohn was to create jobs, largely through infrastructure projects like roads and water systems, to enhance the hope of the Palestinian people.

112. (C) Wary of a "disaster" if Hamas' influence were to increase through Palestinian legislative elections, Soliman said a delay in those elections was necessary. A legislature with 70 percent Hamas representation (which was his prediction of Hamas' current level of potential electoral support) would "not pass any laws" and be ineffective. He called for the strengthening of Fatah before elections are held. Soliman also said he might invite all Palestinian factions and PA President Abu Mazen for "another dialogue" in Egypt to build a greater sense of cooperation.

113. (C) Soliman said he planned to visit Israel in mid-June to discuss Israel's withdrawal plan more fully. He wanted to ask "what they need exactly" to boost the transparency and coordination or disengagement. He said "we can't help them" without knowing their intent and their timetable. In closing, Soliman said he looked forward to meeting Secretary Rice during her upcoming visit to Egypt.

114. (U) General Ward has cleared this message.

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GRAY

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